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OCI No. 2863/65

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
7 January 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Venezuela

1. On 22 December President Leoni paroled, pardoned, or suspended legal proceedings against 127 common criminals and 107 military and civilian prisoners processed in military courts. Some were members of Communist inspired terrorist gangs who had attempted to sabotage the 1963 election, but no important Communist leader or Communist ally was included. Although described in press releases as an "amnesty," the action was in fact a presidential pardon or parole for specific individuals, not a general amnesty for any groups of prisoners. Christmas pardons by selective presidential decree are traditional in Venezuela.

2. Fears on the part of observers that the move might stir resentment among military leaders seem at present to have been unfounded. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Civilian authorities have been in continuing contact with the Minister of Defense and obviously have been explaining their position as it developed in the inter-party conferences which are the basis of the governing coalition.

3. Military coup plotting in Venezuela is endemic and perennial. President Betancourt was subjected to threats of military intervention even before he took office in 1958. After his inauguration the threat became reality several times--most notably at Carupano and Puerto Cabello in 1962.

4. There is no reason to believe Leoni is less adroit than Betancourt in his relationship with the military establishment. [REDACTED]

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[redacted]
[redacted] Younger
officers--and most older officers--are loyal profes-
sional soldiers who can be expected to support any
moderate conciliatory move the government makes.

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5. The pacification of the country is a desideratum of all political parties and most citizens. The techniques of pacification are debatable, of course, but the consensus among Leoni's political advisors now seems to be that partial abandonment of some of the more restrictive measures needed last year to combat the pre-election terrorism is desirable.

6. Urban terrorism in 1964 was at a much lower level than in 1963. The most recent major act of such terrorism was the kidnapping of US Col. Smolen in October. However, sporadic activity by roving bands of guerrillas in the countryside has increased somewhat. Pipelines of US oil companies have been sabotaged, as have other isolated installations. Guerrilla raids on small villages have caused several deaths, including in one case the mayor. The army, with air force support, has maintained steady pressure on the guerrillas, encircling the infested areas and generally preventing major outbreaks. The Venezuelan security forces have not yet been fully committed, apparently preferring the strategy of attrition rather than obliteration.

7. The terrorists apparently have honored the truce they requested during the Christmas season. A continued stand-down of terrorist and guerrilla activity might induce military and civilian leaders to accept an even greater extension of the presidential power of pardon and parole.

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